



Ohio Department of Natural Resources

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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White-nose Syndrome Detected in Ohio

COLUMBUS, OH – Wildlife officials have confirmed the first case of White-nose Syndrome in bats hibernating in an abandoned mine on the Wayne National Forest in Lawrence County.

White-nose syndrome was first detected in New York State in 2006 and has killed more than a million cave-hibernating bats in the eastern North America. Since its initial discovery, white-nose has been confirmed in 15 states and two Canadian provinces; it is suspected to occur in two additional states.

White-nose is associated with a newly identified fungus called *Geomyces destructans*. The disease got its name from how the fungus appears and grows into white tufts on the muzzles of infected bats. Biologists believe the main method of transfer of the disease is bat-to-bat transmission. It's also believed that humans can transport the fungal spores on their shoes, clothes, and other gear from contaminated sites to new sites. White-nose syndrome does not affect human health, in part because the fungus requires temperatures cooler than the human body to survive.

During February and March of 2011 state and federal biologists surveyed mines located in Ohio to assess bat populations and conduct surveillance for white-nose syndrome. Biologists documented over 1,300 bats hibernating at the Lawrence County mine, of which 69 percent were little brown bats, 21 percent were Indiana bats (state and federally endangered), 10 percent were tri-colored bats, and there were smaller numbers of big brown bats and northern bats. Dr. Kevin Keel at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study in Athens, Georgia evaluated samples collected in the mine. Histopathology confirmed observations and the presence of the disease. The mine site is gated and protected from public access.

ODNR Division of Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service have taken pro-active steps in anticipation of WNS. For instance, the Wayne National Forest instituted a comprehensive mine closure order on Forest Service property in 2010, conducted bat population monitoring, engaged in heightened white-nose syndrome surveillance measures, and has proposed little brown, northern, and tri-color bats for sensitive-species listing within the federal

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forest. State and federal agencies will continue to monitor Ohio's bat population, conduct disease surveillance for the syndrome, and implement management strategies to reduce the spread of the disease where applicable.

The numbers of bat deaths nationwide associated with the white-nose syndrome are unprecedented in recent history. The fast rate at which white-nose syndrome spread across eastern North America, the high rate of mortality, and the previously unknown fungal pathogen have made this a challenging disease event. Scientists are actively evaluating the bat species that are most at risk, surveying caves for the presence of the susceptible bats and the disease, and developing strategies for disease management.

Bats play an important role in the ecosystem, serving as a top predator for night-flying insects including mosquitoes, beetles, moths, and other human, agricultural and forest pests.

People can help slow the spread of white-nose and reduce disturbance to bats by staying out of caves and mines. Ohioans who observe more than six dead bats or large numbers of bats flying outside in the winter (less than 40°F), especially near a cave or mine where bats are known to hibernate, should report those observations to the ODNR Division of Wildlife at wildinfo@dnr.state.oh.us, or 1-800-WILDLIFE (945-3543). Utilize the same precautions when dealing with any wild animal, avoid touching wildlife and do not pick up sick or dead bats.

For more information about WNS and Ohio bats, please visit <http://bit.ly/WhiteNoseSyndrome>, www.wildohio.com, and www.fws.gov/whitenosesyndrome.

Photos can be found at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwsnortheast/sets/72157626256548727>

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